Biden’s summits in South Korea and Japan strengthen anti-China alliances

Ben McGrath
23 May 2022

US President Joe Biden concludes his trip to Northeast Asia today, his first to the region since taking office. Holding summits with South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Saturday and Monday respectively, Biden’s goal has been to prepare allies for stepping up Washington’s confrontation with China.

His meetings in Seoul and Tokyo hit many of the same points, checking the many anti-China boxes, including demonizing Beijing over territorial disputes in the region and challenging Beijing over Taiwan. Though Biden’s joint statement with Yoon did not explicitly mention China, the target was clear. Biden and Kishida were far less restrained, however, criticizing Beijing over territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas and hypocritically expressing concerns over “human rights” in Hong Kong and Xinjiang.

Washington also hopes that Biden’s trip will help facilitate better relations between Seoul and Tokyo. For more than a decade now, bilateral relations between South Korea and Japan have been bitter, with Seoul exploiting anti-Japanese sentiment to distract from deteriorating domestic conditions and Tokyo’s remilitarization also raising concerns. Yoon’s new administration has pledged to improve relations with Tokyo.

In Seoul, Biden and Yoon announced that they would take steps to expand military cooperation as “both leaders agree to initiate discussions to expand the scope and scale of combined military exercises and training on and around the Korean Peninsula.” Biden also made clear that “the US extended deterrence commitment” to South Korea, included “using the full range of US defense capabilities, including nuclear, conventional, and missile defense capabilities.”

In addition, Biden and Yoon agreed to restart the Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group “at the earliest date.” The group, which has not met since January 2018, is a forum for discussing strategic and policy issues regarding so-called extended deterrence, including the use of nuclear weapons. Within South Korean ruling circles, conservatives are calling for the return of US nuclear weapons to the country.

Biden made similar assurances to Kishida while in Tokyo, including “the US commitment to the defense of Japan under the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, backed by the full range of capabilities, including nuclear.” In addition, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party initiated a debate in March over the possibility of hosting US nuclear weapons.

These measures are not aimed at impoverished North Korea, as is so often claimed, but at China. Even as Washington escalates its proxy war in Ukraine against Russia, the US is making clear to its allies that military preparations targeting Beijing are continuing unabated.

In fact, while Biden and Yoon made their customary denunciations of Pyongyang, they also extended an offer of “humanitarian aid” to deal with the massive COVID-19 outbreak in North Korea. Washington hopes to entice North Korea out of China’s orbit with promises of economic aid, thereby neutralizing Pyongyang in the event of war with Beijing, or even bringing the North in on the side of US imperialism. For that reason, Biden expressed support for Yoon’s “audacious” plan to strengthen the North Korean economy.

On the other hand, the US has sought to ramp up tensions over Taiwan in Tokyo and Seoul by challenging the “One China” policy, which states that Taiwan is a part of China and is formally accepted in

© World Socialist Web Site

Washington.

During a joint press conference with Kishida on Monday, Biden, when asked if the US would intervene militarily over Taiwan, the US president responded, “Yes. That’s the commitment we made.”

The White House tried to downplay the comment, saying there is no change in US policy. However, it is clear that Washington, first under Trump and now under Biden, intends to chip away at the “One China” policy while accusing Beijing of planning an invasion of Taiwan without any evidence. The purpose is to goad Beijing into taking military action in much the same way Washington did in Ukraine with Russia.

In addition to Biden’s comment on Monday, the US president made sure to include references to Taiwan in the joint statements with Yoon and Kishida, calling for “peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.” This is not an innocent remark, but a calculated inclusion meant to undermine the “One China” policy and Beijing’s legitimacy as the government of China.

Tokyo has also used the tensions instigated by Washington to justify remilitarization, with Tokyo declaring in the summit statement: “Prime Minister Kishida stated his determination to fundamentally reinforce Japan’s defense capabilities and secure substantial increase of its defense budget needed to effect it. President Biden strongly supported Prime Minister Kishida’s determination.”

Tokyo plans to further increase its military spending from the already record amounts to better project its military power overseas in the name of “collective self-defense,” the pretext used to override Article 9 of its constitution that nominally forbids Japan to maintain armed forces and use them to further its imperialist interests.

The economic aspect of Biden’s trip focused on securing supply chains is also part of Washington’s war preparations. While in South Korea, Biden toured a semiconductor plant, declaring afterwards that Washington would ensure “our economic and our national security are not dependent on countries that don’t share our values,” an obvious reference to China.

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) launched on Monday is another component. Biden stated that 13 nations would initially take part in the plan, including both Japan and South Korea. The IPEF is meant to offset the economic influence of Beijing in the region and reduce reliance on the Chinese economy, facilitating the overall war drive. However, as Biden is pursuing the deal through executive orders so as not to risk opposition in Congress, any deal will be unable to offer access to US markets, making it far less attractive to join.

Biden will conclude his trip with a summit of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), a US-led quasi-military alliance aimed at China that includes Japan, Australia, and India. The purpose of Biden’s trip to Asia is to consolidate military alliances against China and reassure allies that the US/NATO proxy war in Ukraine is not a distraction from its preparations for war in Asia.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site